

**Statement by H.E. Archbishop Celestino Migliore  
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Permanent Observer of the Holy See**

**62<sup>nd</sup> session of the UN General Assembly**

**Before the Third Committee, on item 42:**

**Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees,  
questions relating to refugees, returnees and displaced persons  
and humanitarian questions**

**New York, 8 November 2007**

Mr Chairman,

The Holy See expresses deep appreciation to the UNHCR for all its efforts in assisting the 32.9 million persons who have been entrusted to its protection this year. In particular, I note with satisfaction the creative initiatives for more efficient field operations and a better understanding of the challenges, such as the *Field Protection Reference Group*, the upcoming *Dialogue on the challenges of protection* centred on the nexus asylum-migration, and the *Cluster Approach*, which has made possible more precise and coherent interventions in emergency situations.

In the face of a creeping fatigue and pessimism that appears now and then within the international community in the area of humanitarian assistance, this occasion seems appropriate to recall that the UNHCR is one of the essential instruments with which States and the international community as a whole honour their commitment to protect those who flee their homes for various reasons. However, such responsibility cannot be merely left to the Office of the High Commissioner. Rather, concerned States have the duty to protect those persons and sustain them with firm political will and adequate financial resources. In fulfilling their part, States lay a solid basis on which the UNHCR operations can build upon.

The challenges are many, complex and daunting. Our sense of humanity is confronted everyday with news of migrants and refugees — generally a mixture of both and most often undocumented — who try to cross borders in search of safety and better living conditions. In such attempts, many lives are lost everyday. We are not dealing here with sporadic cases. Rather, we have before us masses of peoples on the move for various causes and with varied motivations: peoples driven away from their homes by armed conflicts and persecutions, peoples fleeing from extreme poverty, peoples constrained to migrate because of environmental degradation and natural disasters.

Preoccupations have been expressed that the status of such peoples is caught in legal grey areas, especially when they move across frontiers of countries or regions with rigid migration policies. Concerns increase when doubts arise regarding the applicability of existing international instruments, or when no legal instruments of protection exist. It seems therefore urgent to consider a coordinated international effort, with a view to seeking greater clarity in existing legal instruments of protection or, if need be, to establishing new ones.

However, regardless of such legal grey areas and irrespective of their status as refugees, displaced persons or undocumented migrants, their dignity and human rights cannot be violated nor ignored. Their right to life, to personal

security, to liberty of conscience and of religion, to non discrimination, especially of those most vulnerable like children, come before any legal or political consideration. My delegation therefore appeals to all countries and regions concerned to employ all those measures which are apt to ensure that the human rights of those peoples in such precarious situations are adequately protected and their human dignity respected.

Mr Chairman,

More concretely, we are distressed by the painful conditions of those who flee due to the long-running conflicts in the Democratic Republic of Congo, in Chad, in Darfur, in Afghanistan and in numerous other regions, among which the Middle East stands out with its many problems.

In particular, the Holy See would like once again to draw the attention of the international community to the sufferings of the Iraqi refugees and displaced persons, who flee from indiscriminate attacks, from sectarian and violent acts based on political and religious convictions and on affiliation to specific social groups. This has been the most rapid and massive population displacement during the last years.

The Holy See wishes to express appreciation to Iraq's neighbouring countries which continue to shoulder the burden of welcoming millions of people. The international community must sustain those countries and the UNHCR in their work of ensuring that the Iraqi refugees and displaced persons do not feel abandoned and receive dignified accommodation.

Pope Benedict XVI and many Catholic institutions have repeatedly appealed for urgent measures needed to guarantee protection of and assistance to those persons, while waiting that conditions in their country improve to allow their return.

Mr Chairman,

These huge humanitarian challenges can only be responsibly faced through factual collaboration among States, international organizations, non-governmental organizations and civil society. Such collaboration, conducted in reciprocal trust and solidarity, can truly generate coherent and concrete answers to the cry for help of those in need of international protection.

Thank you, Mr Chairman.